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# Articles in Today's Clips

## Monday, June 30, 2008

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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## Up-the-skirt images will be allowed at teacher Steven Sanger's trial

Posted by [knagenga](#) June 27, 2008 19:55PM



Press File PhotoSuspended Byron Center High School teacher Steven Sanger is accused of secretly taking a picture of a female student's underwear.

GRAND RAPIDS -- A Byron Center High School teacher had more than a dozen up-the-skirt images of females on a digital data card seized from his computer bag during a 2007 police search of his home, authorities said.

A judge determined Friday that those images can be used as evidence in the teacher's upcoming trial.

Suspended teacher Steven Sanger, 40, awaits trial Aug. 4 on a charge of surreptitiously using a camera to take a picture of a female student's undergarments -- a felony punishable by up to five years behind bars.

Kent County Circuit Judge Paul Sullivan on Friday ruled the jury in Sanger's upcoming trial should be allowed to consider whether the other images found on his data card are relevant. Three of those images presented by Assistant Prosecutor Helen Brinkman clearly were shot in a classroom, and the data card was found in the teacher's possession.

The Einstein poster in the background of one of the images matches the one Sanger had in his high school science classroom, Brinkman said.

Sullivan glanced at a couple of Brinkman's 8x10 prints Friday, then averted his eyes.

Defense attorney Daniel Watkins argued the photos should be suppressed because the data card does not fit the camera Sanger had, and the images are date-stamped April 2005 -- two years before the 15-year-old accuser says the teacher snapped a picture up her skirt while discussing a test.

Police found no images that are clearly of the accuser, although three classmates at a September preliminary hearing said they saw an image of what they believed to be the accuser's underwear on Sanger's camera's display screen.

However, in another court motion, Sullivan agreed with Watkins that a 1996 reprimand of the teacher should not be included as evidence in his trial. In that incident, Sanger was reprimanded for not immediately stopping male students from downloading pictures of actress Pamela Anderson from the Internet, and participating in their discussion of women, which other students told school officials was derogatory.

Sullivan said that incident probably happened too long ago to be relevant.

Sanger, who remains free on bond and suspended without pay from his job, did not accompany his lawyer to court Friday.

Categories: [Breaking News](#), [Editors' Choice](#), [Top Stories](#)

## Comments

Footer



June 29, 2008

## Clinton County food distribution is July 10

BATH — The Clinton County Open Food Distribution Project distributes food to Clinton County families in need on the second Thursday of each month at the Bath Community Center, 5959 Park Lake Road in Bath.

The next distribution date is Thursday, July 10.

Registration for distribution takes place from 8 to 9 a.m. at the site. Distribution begins around 10 a.m. and continues for approximately one hour. Participants are asked to bring their own boxes, bags, containers, wheeled carts or wagons.

Those who can benefit from this service include senior citizens on fixed incomes, families and individuals with limited incomes or working minimum wage jobs as well as individuals who must choose between purchasing groceries or fulfilling medical needs.

The Clinton County Open Food Distribution Project, a program developed by the Clinton Memorial Hospital Foundation in conjunction with the Healthy Community Coalition Committee, began in 2002. Volunteers and generous supporters have supplied 1,800 people in the Clinton County area with \$112,000 in fresh produce and food products during the past year. Total distribution exceeded 66,000 pounds of food.

The Clinton Memorial Hospital Foundation, American Red Cross and Greater Lansing Food Bank support the monthly distribution along with local churches, Church World Services/CROP Walk and DeWitt Area Lions and Lioness clubs.

The project operates as an open food distribution for Clinton County families in need, offering a wide variety of food items in addition to produce and perishables.

Call Clinton Transit at (989) 224-8127 or 800-800-5938 for more information about possible transportation assistance. Requests for transport must be made at least 24 hours prior to this event.

For more information about sponsorship and volunteer opportunities or future distribution dates, call the Clinton Memorial Hospital Foundation at (989) 227-3333.

—From Clinton Memorial Hospital

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## Father, son shot after breaking into house of father's estranged girlfriend

Posted by [tfettig](#) June 30, 2008 10:39AM

LAKEVIEW -- A father and son were shot -- the son suffering a fatal wound to the chest -- after they broke into the father's estranged girlfriend's house earlier this morning in a rural area near Lakeview.

Zachary Stevens collapsed in the front yard of Kelly Ann Keating's home at 7861 Edgar Road, just south of M-46, and was pronounced dead at the scene. His father, Robert Stevens, 44, suffered a bullet wound to the leg and was taken to Spectrum Health Butterworth hospital.

Montcalm County Sheriff Bill Barnwell said Robert Stevens allegedly made at least one threatening phone call to Keating before the incident. A 35-year-old male friend of Keating, who had a handgun for protection, was inside the house with several other people when the two men pushed an air conditioner out of a window to gain entry.

The 35-year-old, whose name was not released and is not charged, shot the two men, Barnwell said. He did not immediately know whether words were exchanged between the men.

Barnwell described the relationship of Keating and Robert Stevens as "on-again, off-again" and said it had been a volatile relationship.

Police had been to the home before for domestic disputes, Barnwell said.

Police are gathering information about the shooting and will forward a report to the Montcalm County Prosecutor's office for review and possible charges.

Categories: [Breaking News](#)

### Comments

Footer

Mesick man attempts to burn down house with wife, children inside

A 47-year-old Mesick man attempted to burn down his house Sunday - with his wife and children inside.

Michigan State Police Cadillac Post troopers were dispatched to the scene at 6:35 p.m. Sunday, and upon arrival, officers noted a strong odor of diesel fuel and saw the fuel's splash marks on the porch and siding of the home.

Police searched the residence and discovered the occupants escaped out of the back door into the woods. Officers found the victims in the woods uninjured and interviewed them. According to Sgt. Mike Salasky of Michigan State Police Cadillac Post, the victims told officers that the Mesick man attempted to light the house and them on fire.

The suspect also fled the scene, but police captured him a short time later.

The Mesick man was lodged at the Wexford County jail, and he will remain there until arraignment in Cadillac's 84th district court today.

He was arrested for preparation to burn real property, which is a 10 year felony with a fine of up to \$15,000, and assault.



Monday, June 30, 2008

# Michigan jobless to draw 13 more weeks of unemployment benefits

Deb Price / The Detroit News

**WASHINGTON** -- President Bush signed legislation Monday that includes a 13-week extension of unemployment benefits for jobless workers.

"I am ecstatic," said David Bomar, a 39-year-old Detroit public school teacher who was laid off and received his final unemployment check in January.

"It is most certainly going to assist me," he said. "On the other hand, I still have got 13 weeks to continue to find a job."

The 13 extra weeks of benefits are crucial in Michigan, which has the nation's highest jobless rate at 8.5 percent. The national average is 5.5 percent.

The benefits are expected to be available by the end of July. Those currently receiving checks would simply get the extended checks. Those who've exhausted benefits will be notified about the extension and then must reapply, showing they still haven't found work.

The extension would help about 226,000 jobless workers in Michigan, whose benefits are either already exhausted or will be soon.

In Michigan, jobless workers now can get 26 weeks of unemployment compensation. The legislation extends that to 39 weeks.

Jobless workers who exhausted their benefits between November 2006 and March 2009 will qualify for the extension.

The bill included \$162 billion to fund the Iraq war, college tuition for veterans and disaster relief for the flooding Midwest.

Bush noted the bill includes "a measured expansion of unemployment insurance benefits with a reasonable work requirement."

In earlier fights with the Democratic-led Congress, Bush resisted extending unemployment benefits, saying the economy wasn't bad enough to justify an extension.

Then, Democrats were pushing a proposal that included 13 weeks, plus an additional 13 weeks for hard-hit states such as Michigan with higher than 6 percent unemployment rates.

Bush and the Democratic lawmakers worked out a deal that included the 13 weeks of extended benefits.

But Rep. Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak, and Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, are pushing for the bonus weeks for hard-hit states.

Detroit's DeJuan Smith, 31, was off in February from his job as an automotive painter.

"I am very happy (with Bush's action today)," he said. "I have been looking for work, and I just can't seem to find any."

*You can reach Deb Price at [dprice@detnews.com](mailto:dprice@detnews.com) or (202) 662-8736.*

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## Hard times force residents to change ways

By **LINDSAY VanHULLE**

lvanhulle@record-eagle.com

June 29, 2008 11:09 am

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### Special Report: Down, But Not Out

This story is one in a three-day series that examines the lives of those caught in the grip of the failing state and national economies, and offers snapshot examples of how your friends, family, neighbors, and communities cope during bad times.

Return to the Record-Eagle Monday and Tuesday for more stories and photos, and read the full series at [record-eagle.com/economy](http://record-eagle.com/economy).

TRAVERSE CITY -- Not long ago, Rochelle Rascon brought home a full week's wage from her job as a cook at a Bellaire restaurant.

But that changed last fall when she was laid off. Now, she's only scheduled one or two days a week. The service industry, she said, is especially troubled right now.

After all, when people stop dining out, a trickle-down effect is inevitable.

"A lot of people aren't going out to eat anymore because they just can't afford to," Rascon said. "Most people can't afford to go anywhere but home."

Rascon's story isn't an isolated incident. There are thousands more like it these days, as people cut coupons, pinch pennies and limit lifestyles to deal with an ever-worsening economy.

Ask around, and you'll struggle to find someone who hasn't been affected by the continued economic slump gripping both the state and the nation. The face of hardship transcends age, geography, background, race and socioeconomic status.

The difficulties, of course, are not the same for everyone. Just as the distribution of wealth is unequal in society, so is the distribution of adversity.

The most widely reported challenges are those faced by people at the bottom of the income ladder. Census data from 2006 show 7.3 percent of Grand Traverse County residents live below the poverty line, up from 5.9 percent in 2000.

And many people, some not earning much more than minimum wage, often drive from outlying areas into Traverse City for work.

That extends into other sectors, as well. Several government employees of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians undertake long daily commutes to Peshawbestown in Leelanau County from Kewadin, Mancelona and Kalkaska. The band is considering a four-day work week for its roughly 225 employees.

Hard times force residents to change ways

"The cost of gas is really spurring this," tribal manager Mary Pelcher said. "You're doing what you can and being creative."

But some things, like rising food and energy costs, are ubiquitous. People of all income brackets are being forced to change their lifestyles to make ends meet.

Even foreclosures are nondiscriminatory. In Grand Traverse County alone, repossessed homes fetched anywhere from \$24,000 to \$1.9 million at sheriff's auctions so far this year.

"Years ago, people would lose their house on a sheriff's deed, but there was a good chance it went to the bank and they managed to redeem the property," said Peggy Haines, the county's register of deeds. "The biggest thing now is they don't get redeemed."

Finding affordable housing is a challenge for many, even without the threat of foreclosure.

Rascon, the Bellaire cook, is looking to move out of her apartment, in part because she had to assume payment of her utility bills when her landlord no longer could. She is concerned not just about herself, but about her mother and 14-year-old daughter.

"I'm sure he did the best he could, until he couldn't do it anymore," she said. "I don't see an end anytime soon."

### Helping hands

The number of people seeking assistance certainly hasn't ebbed. Some regional nonprofit organizations report year-to-date increases in both the number of clients and the amount of aid distributed.

In the first five months of 2008, 3,584 families received food from Traverse City's Father Fred Foundation, a 49 percent increase from the same period in 2007. More than \$166,000 worth of food was given, up 24 percent from the year before.

Roughly \$110,000 in cash assistance was given for utility payments, a 36 percent jump from 2007. Funding is down for other types of assistance so the agency can concentrate on utility bills, Father Fred executive director Martie Manty said.

Several regional food pantries noted a growing number of people seeking help this year who never sought it before.

Julie Kirchoff is one of them. Her husband is injured and can't work, and she has a job at a small grocery store in Cedar.

She was surprised to learn the price of certain food items had risen at the larger area supermarkets.

"I know it's only 20 cents," Kirchoff said. "But if everything goes up 20 cents, who won't be affected?"

Good Samaritan Family Services in Ellsworth went from distributing food to about 350 families each month last year to about 500 now, director Mary Peterson said.

Many of the new clients are seniors on fixed incomes.

Seniors across the region are trying new strategies in light of strained finances.

John Brewer is showing up more often for a low-cost lunch at Traverse City Senior Center. Most of his money is in certificates of deposit, so he knows how today's low interest rates affect income.

Brewer, 70, also saves money by turning to the Veterans Administration for much of his medical care. And he stopped buying national brands at the grocery store.

Hard times force residents to change ways

He tries to stay optimistic, but it's difficult given the "depressing" state of affairs.

"This is about the worst I've had it my whole life," said Brewer, of Traverse City. "I'm sort of resigned to it, but it kind of scares me."

### Lifelong lessons

During the recession of the 1970s, Carolyn Swoveland bought more store-brand groceries and watched her spending. She had young children to raise.

The same ideas apply now, even though her children are grown. It's important not to be afraid, she said. It's crucial to be aware.

"We don't go out to eat as much, just like everybody else," said Swoveland, of Traverse City. "You just kind of shift your money to different places."

Emily Olson and her husband, David, are children of the Great Depression, and grew up with their parents' lessons firmly in mind.

Save your money. Always.

Today, the Elmwood Township residents are careful about how much they drive amid rising gas prices, but their lifelong thrift allows them to spend the winter months of their retirement in Gulf Shores, Ala.

"We all saved, and it wasn't instant gratification. We didn't have the big house," said Emily Olson, 78. "Our parents worked and saved and worried: Did you have enough money? That's not the mindset of my kids."

Many younger people haven't lived through trying economic times that confronted their parents and grandparents. For them, surviving a tough economy means learning along the way.

Amy Thompson knows she can't avoid purchasing food. She can, however, avoid buying gas.

Prices last summer -- above \$3 a gallon then -- inspired her family to travel nearly everywhere by bicycle in warm months.

For the times they need a car, Thompson, of Traverse City, said they have discussed buying a hybrid vehicle.

"I don't expect gas to plummet back to \$2 anytime soon," she said. "The way we do things has to change."

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### Photos



Allied Van Lines crewman Anthony Carr, center, and van foreman Andy Pawloski, right, load the personal belongings of Kristin Guthrie into a semi-truck and trailer outside of her residence in Traverse City. Allied Van Lines has twice as many people relocating out of Michigan than those immigrating to the state. Guthrie is relocating to Virginia for a teaching job. Record-Eagle



Rochelle Rascon is moving from the home she-s renting in Bellaire with her 14-year-old daughter because of the possible foreclosure of the home. Her mother, Jody, is also facing foreclosure on the Central Lake home she-s lived in for nearly 20 years. Record-Eagle



Jody Rascon, right, and daughter Rochelle Rascon are moving from the home they're renting in Bellaire because of possible foreclosure. Record-Eagle



June 29, 2008

## Iron Mountain man rebuilds, gives fishing gear to needy kids

*Angie Dubose*  
*Associated Press*

Al Saunders of Iron Mountain must love to fish because he sure likes fixing tackle.

Saunders, 82, collects junk fishing tackle from tackle shops, businesses and private individuals in Florida and Michigan.

He collects all the broken rods, gnarled tips and spare handles that he can find, and makes sturdy fishing rods for deserving children.

Watching a child cradle one of his hand-repaired rods is his reward.

As he transforms these odds and ends into prized possessions, he pictures a child loving the sport of fishing as much as he does.

Saunders is an emotional man who feels that a small part of him goes into every rod he repairs.

He truly loves to fish and enjoys sharing his experiences with just about anyone who will listen.

For the past two years, he has been making and donating fishing rods to children under 15 who could otherwise not afford to fish.

Saunders seeks donations of spare parts as well as volunteers to collect the tackle.

"It doesn't have to be a shiny treasure," he said.

He even takes good rods and reels to fix the broken ones.

Saunders has been a winter resident in Bradenton, Fla., since 1956, but is a summer resident of Iron Mountain.

He was born in Iron Mountain, graduating from high school and college and entering the consulting business for a portion of his career.

Now retired, he doesn't take a break from repairing fishing tackle.

The first year, he repaired 78 rods, and last year, he repaired 107.

His goal for this year is 160.

Saunders got his start when good friend and Bradenton resident, Jim Crotts, sold him a rod-building machine.

He since has built his own rod-repairing machine with a few major additions.

"It isn't finished yet," he said. "I have more to do on it."

Saunders built his first rod in 1947 and caught a 45 pound, 3 ounce lake trout that was the country's third largest reported to Field and Stream Magazine in 1956.

One of his favorite experiences was when a mother of three came and asked if he could help them find fishing rods for the boys.

Saunders recognized that the mother would not be able to afford the tackle. Starting with the youngest, he let the boys pick rods from the back of his Ford Explorer.

The boys asked him if they were theirs to keep. He said yes, and as they cradled the poles and walked off for home, Saunders almost wept for joy.

Saunders has been married to Noreen for 62 years.

She shares his passion for life. She likes antiques and has decorated their log cabin with family heirlooms and special memories of their life together.

As he works in his hobby shop, she takes care of him.

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Monday, June 30, 2008

## Farmington Hills

# Churches offer 'Angel Food' to help families stretch dollars

## Wellspring in Farmington Hills joins others in Metro Detroit in discount grocery program.

Delores Flynn / The Detroit News

**FARMINGTON HILLS** -- Margaret Weiss works six days a week at two part-time jobs, and the rising cost of gas and groceries is making her stretch every dollar further, making life even harder.

"It's a big shuffle of how to spend my money," Weiss said. "I have to pay for blood pressure and thyroid meds, \$25 more to fill my gas tank, and now I come out of a grocery store with three bags of food that can cost like \$100. People have to eat, and there's just no place in the area to get good food at a decent price."

She learned about a church-based Angel Food Ministries program in Madison Heights from a friend and asked her pastor about getting their church on board. The monthly program provides food at a reduced cost. Participants pay \$30 for food valued at \$60. This month, Wellspring Church in Farmington Hills joined the ranks of 44 churches in Metro Detroit offering grocery aid.

There are no income restrictions. A box of food can feed a single person for a month or a family for a week.

"If you eat, you're eligible," Pastor Jane Moschenrose of Wellspring said. "That's one of the benefits because oftentimes people around here aren't eligible for free food or social service programs, but they're still struggling."

"I haven't met many with raises that match the cost of living. This helps take some of the sting out."

In the nonprofit, nondenominational Angel Food program, discounted bulk food is bought directly from producers for distribution to churches.

Wellspring has received 46 primary food orders and 36 orders for specialty boxes for residents from Detroit to West Bloomfield, Moschenrose said. The specialty boxes include meats for grilling -- steak, chicken and pork -- as well as seasonal fruit and vegetables for an additional \$16 to \$20, depending on the package. Primary food offerings include items such as turkey, green beans, rice, manicotti and blueberry muffin mix.

The church takes orders two weeks before the delivery date, typically the last Saturday of each month. Participants can pay with cash, money order or food-assistance Bridge cards.

Weiss, who attends Wellspring, said the response from the community has been "tremendous."

"We're getting 10-12 calls a day. It's just a hand that is so needed right now."

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.detroitnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080630/METRO02/806300365>

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June 30, 2008

## Proof of citizenship requirement stops many from getting welfare

Michigan's standards are stricter than most

*Kathy Barks Hoffman*  
*Associated Press*

For lack of \$10, Margo Kindred felt compelled to move with her teenage son and three young grandchildren to a homeless shelter.

Though she qualifies for welfare benefits, Kindred didn't find out she needed to present her Colorado birth certificate until after she couldn't afford the motel room she had been renting.

Kindred, of Battle Creek, couldn't scrounge up the \$10 payment to get the document. "I couldn't squeeze it out because there was nothing left to squeeze," the 38-year-old said.

Michigan is one of the few states that gives health care coverage automatically to children and adults on welfare. But there's a catch: Proof of citizenship is required.

Michigan and Nebraska appear to be the only states that won't give cash assistance unless proof of citizenship is shown, although Missouri is joining their ranks. Some states, such as Virginia, require applicants to show a birth certificate or Social Security number. But they allow applicants to sign an affidavit of citizenship if they can't provide the documents. Michigan and Nebraska don't have that out.

## Applications down

The proof of citizenship requirements are being promoted as a way to keep people who are in the country illegally from getting government assistance. But they go beyond having to show a driver's license or proving that, as a foreign resident, a person is in the country legally.

Critics say many are being forced to wait weeks or even months for help while they get their paperwork in order, while some are so discouraged by the requirement that they don't even apply.

A federal study last year showed that the number of people getting Medicaid coverage dropped in many states after the new requirement was put in place on the federal level. Advocates for the poor in Michigan say the same is happening now to welfare applicants in the state.

"People are not getting the help they need and they're eligible for," said Sharon Parks of the Michigan League for Human Services in Lansing.

For many, like Kindred, the requirement is a surprise. A women's group in Battle Creek eventually put up the money, and state officials approved her payments.

Until they started last month - adding \$91 to her monthly \$598 check - Kindred got by on the children's welfare payments and the food stamps she was able to get because that program didn't require a birth certificate. All the welfare money went to house the family at a small motel.

## Food stamps on rise

Despite the state's weak economy, Michigan's May welfare caseload was down to its lowest level since December 2002, having dropped by 18 percent in the past year alone.

Yet the food assistance program - which allows people to qualify with far more income - set a record high last month. The number of households getting food stamps has increased about 70 percent since December 2002.

"It's troubling to see the cash assistance numbers falling when we know that the level of need throughout the state is growing," Parks said.

But a director in the Michigan Department of Human Services said the tougher proof of citizenship requirements aren't solely responsible for the decrease. Michigan also has made its work requirements stricter.

"Less people may be applying because of eligibility issues," said Barbara Anders, director of the Bureau of Adult and Family Services. "I don't think we can say it's any one item."

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June 30, 2008

## Parents rush to get children fitted for car booster seats as law set to begin

*Kathleen Lavey  
Lansing State Journal*

Four-year-old Samuel Friedrich gave up his old car seat Saturday morning and moved into a brand-new booster.

His mom, Michelle Friedrich and grandmother, Mary Montgomery, brought him and his sister, Sophia, 2, to a car seat fitting event Saturday at Babies "R" Us on West Saginaw Highway.

"I figured I'd come here and see if what I have in this vehicle works properly and if they're actually safe," said Friedrich, of Palo in Ionia County.

The car seat fitting and booster seat giveaway were in preparation for Tuesday, when a new Michigan law takes effect requiring kids to ride in booster seats until their eighth birthday or until they are 4 feet, 9 inches tall, whichever comes first.

Under the old law, kids could abandon car seats for seat belts at age 4. Drivers face a \$65 ticket if kids aren't in a booster.

Part of the Saturday morning event was a booster seat giveaway, to help people get 4- to 8-year olds on the road safely.

Parents have faced paying for the new seats, making sure they get the right seats for their cars and fitting multiple seats into one car.

## Reducing the risk

Seat belts are designed to fit adults and are too big for most children, said Jeff Spitzley, coordinator of Safe Kids Michigan. Booster seats help keep shoulder and lap belts in the right places on a child's body, reducing the risk of serious injury.

"There is a much higher rate of injury in this age group than among younger kids, who have to ride in car seats, and older kids, who do fit the seat belts," Spitzley said. Children ages 4-8 in seat belts alone are four times more likely to be injured in an accident than if they're using a booster.

Currently, studies show that 10 to 20 percent of Michigan families use booster seats for 4- to 8-year-old kids, Spitzley said.

More than 90 percent use car seats for kids ages 4 and younger, which have been mandated by law for years.

"It'll take some time for booster seat usage to get that high, but we expect a significant increase in the percentage of kids riding in boosters via this law," Spitzley said.

## Finding a seat

Low-back booster seats are available at stores such as Meijer, Target and Kmart for as little as \$15, while the typical price range for a high-back booster seat is \$30 to \$80, Spitzley said.

You can pay more than \$200 for a seat, but a high-priced seat isn't necessarily safer than a cheaper one.

"They're all really just as good at what they do," Spitzley said.

He said low-back seats are fine for most newer cars, which have head supports on back as well as front seats. Cars with low-backed back seats or cars that don't have headrests required a high-backed booster.

It's best to have a new booster seat, Spitzley said. But a hand-me-down seat may be OK if you know the seat's history.

"If you have a close enough relationship with the person that has been using the seat, how the seat has been used and cared for, I wouldn't see any problem with it," he said.

If you do wind up with a second-hand seat, check with the manufacturer to see if it has been recalled. Some seats also have expiration dates stamped on them. Don't use a seat after that date. It's best to discard any seat after five or six years.

"The best practice would be to purchase a new one, but I think we have to be real about this," Spitzley said.

"People are going to hand down booster seats."

The Capital Area Safe Kids Coalition will try to work with families who need seats and can't afford them, said Mickie Kreft, coordinator.

## Cramming in seats

Alyse Sandborn of East Lansing has managed to fit three car seats into the back of her Volkswagen Passat station wagon, but admits it wasn't easy.

"It's a hassle," she said. "They are very tight in my back seat. I think I'm the only one who can fit my hand in and knows how to buckle them."

Her son, Ethan, 8, is old enough to not ride in a seat, but she doesn't feel he's tall enough yet to ride without one. Daughter Lara, 5, is in a booster and baby Elin, 1, is in an infant car seat. She also keeps extra boosters on hand to use in her husband Mike's SUV if they're carrying other kids with them.

Using the best safety devices available only makes sense to her.

"I can't control if someone is going to hit me," Sandborn said. "But I can keep my kids in the safest, most appropriate seating and give them the best chance if we are in an accident."

Depending on the car and the type of booster, three seats won't always fit in back.

The safest practice probably is putting the oldest child in a booster seat in the front seat, Spitzley said.

"It's not the ideal scenario," he said. "If you have an air bag that can be turned off, turn it off. Move the vehicle seat back as far as you can from the dash."

## Older seats unreliable

At the Saturday car seat fitting event, a steady flow of cars stopped for 15 to 30 minutes as technicians checked seats, untwisted straps and adjusted each seat individually to the child riding in them.

Friedrich found out that the seats they used in her mom's car were manufactured in 1999 and 1997 - too old to be reliable. She replaced one immediately with Samuel's new, free low-back booster and made plans to replace the other. She also learned how to adjust the back seat belt to make the car seat fit tightly in place and how to adjust the booster seat and car seat to minimize injury to the kids in case of an accident.

"I'm glad I came," Friedrich said.

Contact Kathleen Lavey at 377-1251 or [klavey@lsj.com](mailto:klavey@lsj.com).

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## Michigan legislators approve parts of next state budget, but public schools funding still undecided

Posted by [jbarr](#) June 28, 2008 10:00AM

LANSING -- Michigan lawmakers began approving parts of the next state budget Friday, but as of midnight Friday they still hadn't decided how much money will be headed to public K-12 schools.

School funding is being held up by a disagreement over Gov. Jennifer Granholm's plan to open smaller high schools in some Michigan cities. The Democratic governor wants money for that project included in the spending plan that begins Oct. 1. But Republicans in the state Senate don't, saying they are worried about its startup costs and the consequences of borrowing money in a tough economic climate.

Granholm wants to create 100 small high schools with no more than 400 students each, saying the program could help reduce Michigan's dropout rate. The expansion of an existing pilot project would be funded by \$300 million raised by borrowing against future school aid revenue and would include \$500,000 to administer the program.

"The bottom line is we need to address this dropout rate if we're to be competitive as a state and give every child a chance," Granholm said.

Granholm would like some of the schools to open in late 2009, but the money raised by the borrowing could be spent over a period of up to five years.

Supporters say smaller schools help keep students focused and provide them more individualized attention so they stay on track to graduate.

The Republican-led Senate isn't buying into the plan.

"It would be better invested into more dollars in the classroom for each pupil statewide," said Matt Marsden, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester.

Some schools are against the smaller high school plan, saying they would rather get more money in the grants that are allocated on a per-pupil basis.

All schools now get at least \$7,204 per student. Some districts get more than \$12,000 per student.

All schools likely will get a per pupil increase this fall, but the amount will vary by how much they receive now and whether lawmakers decide to fund the smaller high schools and early education proposals supported by Granholm.

Other pieces of the budget plan were rounding into shape Friday during a lengthy session, the last scheduled before the Michigan Legislature goes on summer break. The House and Senate passed several budget bills that soon could be headed to Granholm for her signature. Both chambers remained in session late Friday.

Overall, this year's budget debate is much calmer than last year's. There aren't any proposed tax increases such as the ones that bitterly divided lawmakers and delayed adoption of this fiscal year's budget.

The Legislature is working on a \$44 billion spending plan covering everything from state prisons to training for displaced workers. Overall spending would increase about 1.8 percent compared to this year.

The plan that was moving through the Legislature is about \$400 million shy of the budget proposed by Granholm in February.

Both the House and Senate approved a bill that would give the state's 15 public four-year universities a 1 percent across-the-board increase, not the 3 percent they were expecting to get earlier in the budget process. That could put pressure on universities to continue raising tuition.

Community colleges would get a funding increase of about 2 percent, although the percentage would vary by school.

The budget deal includes about \$7 million to finish training 100 new Michigan State Police troopers and \$1 million to reduce the backlog of cases waiting for analysis at state police crime labs.

Granholtz's plan to help retrain displaced Michigan workers would get a \$15 million boost. Granholtz had wanted \$40 million more for her No Worker Left Behind Program.

The Department of Corrections budget would drop by \$50 million, the first cut in six years. The state plans to close a women's prison in suburban Detroit in 2009.

Budgets for departments covering transportation and community health hadn't been taken up as of late Friday.

Categories: [Education](#), [Government](#), [State news](#), [Top Stories](#)

## Comments

### **FUTURESTAKE** says...

I'm with the Senate on this one..Yes, Granholtz's small schools plan has an element long term appreciation for Michigan's youth,BUT this is not the time for it..We have struggled with State revenues,budget balancing,& other pressing problems such as the State's infrastructure & Corrections issues..If I were Jenny I would shelve this school plan until the State is on stronger fiscal footing,more safe & sound with our budgeting considerations..Her plan could be reviewed next fiscal year if our fiscal strength is on solid ground.. Right now it's just too iffy, in layman terms.. We have too many basic pressing issues to address first!

Posted on 06/28/08 at 12:51PM

### **coach1202** says...

Funny thing is missing. Lansing continues to completely avoid the real school funding problem. The real problem is the RETIREMENT system.

If each underfunded school gets an increase of \$120 per pupil, nearly 50% of that will go directly into the retirement system. That combined with the increases in fuel and utility costs mean the schools will face even more cuts if all other factors remain the same.

When more than 50% of the increase is going to one item that only the legislature and governor can control and they refuse to address the issue there is a problem. While the initial cause of this problem doesn't lay with Granholtz, she needs to show the leadership to fix the problem. The author of this problem was Engler who removed a significant portion of the money that had been pre-funded into the retirement system and transferred it to the general fund. He also prohibited schools from pre-funding the retirement system.

The latest information I saw indicated that had the schools been allowed to pre-fund the retirement system even after the money was removed in the early 1990's, the schools would only be paying 11.5% of salaries into the retirement system instead of nearly 19%. That may not seem like much, but with a medium sized district having nearly 400 employees, that average \$35,000 per school year in pay, the difference between what they could be paying had pre-funding been allowed and what they pay now would be roughly \$1,000,000 per school year that district is SAVING. How many districts are facing budget shortfalls near that much this school year.

What would happen if the state required school employees to pay 1% more into their retirement system each year? A 1% rise in staff contributions would mean the employees in the district I mention above would pay an additional \$140,000 per year into the system. It isn't a significant portion of the money, however it is a small step.

The simple FACT is that the school retirement system is the leading factor that is killing public schools in the state. It isn't funding inequity, or a lack of state funding. It is the required contributions back into the retirement system. The schools have no choice in the matter regarding making these payments. The state officials needs to step up and fix this HUGE PROBLEM.

Posted on 06/28/08 at 5:27PM

Footer



## TOP STORY ■■■

MONDAY, JUNE 30, 2008

# State workers: Thank God It's Thursday

By Daniel Petty, Special to Stateline.org

As fuel and energy costs continue to soar to record highs, a growing number of states are offering more of their public employees compressed workweeks to hold down states' energy spending and give long-distance commuters some relief from paying high gas prices.

Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr.(R), announcing on June 26 the most comprehensive plan in the country, ordered about 17,000 state employees to a 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. work schedule Mondays through Thursdays — a plan set to begin the first week of August and continue for at least a year. Essential services, such as highway patrols, courts, public schools and colleges, will not be affected by the changes, which are expected to save the state \$3 million, Lisa Roskelley, the governor's spokeswoman, said.

Florida, Kentucky and South Carolina already have offered optional compressed workweeks to a handful of its state employees, while a smattering of other states — Arkansas, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Vermont among them — are considering expanding existing programs to more state agencies.

Utah stands alone as the only state to make four-day workweeks mandatory for agencies and shut down offices on Fridays. About 1,000 of the 3,000 state buildings will be closed that day under the new plan.

Departments in other states with similar programs remain open five days a week, but stagger workers' schedules, although many have for years offered flex-time and four-day schedules to some employees.

Supporters say four-day workweeks help commuter-clogged roads, give people access to government services for longer hours, reduce emissions and conserve energy at state facilities — a residual benefit that saves taxpayers money. Keeping workers home once a week also appeals to rural states where mass transit is limited or nonexistent.

Critics of the compressed workweek charge that it's an inconvenience for the customers government is required to serve. Others argue the extended workdays burden those who require daycare for children or have special commuting arrangements. Even advocates say four-day work weeks aren't for all employees

Concentrating on one task for 10 hours a day can also be tiresome or unbearable for some state employees, such as those investigating child abuse, said Kay Durnett, executive director of the Arkansas State Employees Association (ASEA).

But the benefits of a shorter workweek are obvious to 52-year-old Craig Tuck of Higgins Lake, Mich., who drives 148 miles a day working for the Michigan Department of Community health.

Tuck says he puts \$150 of gas in his Buick Regal every week and makes slightly more than \$20 an hour as a 15-year state employee. Switching jobs isn't an option, because unemployment in Michigan's struggling economy is so high. Moving closer to work wouldn't lead to savings either, he said, because his fiancé would have to travel farther to her job.

Two weeks ago, Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D) announced that her office was considering workweek alternatives to help commuters save fuel.

“While I know that the nature of the job and the needs of certain customers prevent telecommuting and flex schedules from a viable option for every position in state government, it does make sense for many positions,” Granholm said in a June 16 statement.

Tuck and other state employees in his facility advocate compressing their workweeks to the 10-hours-a-day, four-day schedule.

“I’m glad the governor has seen this as a problem, but I’m saddened that we had to get to this point to support [alternatives],” Tuck said.

But while Ohio’s economy, like Michigan’s, is also struggling from a waning manufacturing industry and high unemployment, state officials there say government services and their customers come first.

“Agencies should use a compressed workweek schedule only when a specific business process warrants such a schedule,” a Feb. 2 government memo from the Department of Administrative Services reads. “In most situations, personal circumstances should not be a fact or in the decision to utilize a compressed workweek schedule.”

State lawmakers in Arkansas have agreed to study a four-day workweek plan from state Sen. Tracy Steele (D). Fewer than half of Arkansas state agencies, boards and commissions offer flex-time policies, which allow workers to adjust their work schedules, ASEA’s Durnett said.

About 400 people use ASEA’s vanpool program, and many more have been placed on a waiting list because demand is so high, she said.

In Kentucky, 15 of 33 eligible employees in the secretary of state’s office are now working with staggered four-day workweeks after the program was introduced in mid-June and will remain in effect for several months as a trial. Productivity has increased and office morale is higher, and some are using the extra time off to work second jobs because of a salary freeze initiated several years ago, said Les Fugate, deputy assistant secretary of state.

In a recent study, researchers from Brigham Young University showed that city employees in Spanish Fork, Utah, who work four 10-hour days a week, reported less at-home conflict, which the workers said increased efficiency at work and job satisfaction.

In Oklahoma, state Rep. Mike Shelton (D) and the Oklahoma Public Employees Association are pushing to close government offices one day a week.

“Hardworking state employees need a break, and without a pay increase, a condensed work schedule is the best way to give it to them,” Shelton said in a news release ahead of a July 9 hearing about four-day workweeks.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson (D) has ordered each state agency to adopt a policy for telecommuting and alternate work schedules by Sept. 1. Spokeswoman Caitlin Kelleher said the government, as the state’s largest employer, is considering establishing satellite offices in Albuquerque, N.M., to keep workers from having to commute to Santa Fe.

The Florida attorney general’s office started offering four-day workweeks to about 500 employees last month, 100 of whom have joined the summertime program. The South Carolina Department of Transportation also introduced a summer pilot program June 16, and about 11 percent of the department’s employees has enrolled..

Vermont State Sen. Vincent Illuzzi (R) proposed on June 17 shifting state government and public schools to a shortened workweek. Delaware lawmakers considered a four-day workweek bill this session, but it died in committee, and three West Virginia lawmakers

sponsored a resolution to study shortened workweeks for government employees.

Some state universities and community colleges are moving to four-day work weeks for the summer, and the trend has emerged in numerous city, county and other local governments.

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Contact Daniel Petty at [dpetty@stateline.org](mailto:dpetty@stateline.org).

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